



**Testimony of the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity,  
presented by Roberta Friedman  
S.B. 1080  
Public Health Committee  
March 6, 2009**

Senator Harris, Representative Ritter, and members of the Committee,  
Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony on Raised Bill No. 1080.

The Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity seeks to improve the world's diet, prevent obesity, and reduce weight stigma. The Center establishes creative connections between science and public policy and develops targeted research to inform and empower the public and policy makers, and to maximize the impact on public health. We have written extensively about, and done research on, menu labeling as a public health measure.

In Connecticut, approximately 56% of adults are overweight or obese and 12.3% of children ages 10-17 are obese. The solutions to this epidemic must be science-based, positively alter the environment so they reach many people at once, and enable people to more easily practice healthy behavior. Menu labeling is one proposed approach. The practice has been endorsed by the U.S. Surgeon General, the Institute of Medicine, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and the American Medical Association.

**Available scientific evidence supports the practice of menu labeling.** Consider the following:

- Today, Americans spend almost one-half (47.9 percent) of their food budget and eat one-third of their calories in restaurants and from other food service vendors.
- Foods that are prepared and eaten outside the home tend to be higher in calories, saturated fat, carbohydrates, and sugar, and are nutritionally poorer than foods made at home.
- Restaurant portion sizes have increased and studies show that people eat more when served larger portions. These portions can contain as much as an entire day's worth of the daily allowance of 2,000 calories as recommended by the USDA.
- Studies show that consuming fast food is positively associated with increased risk for insulin resistance, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and obesity.

**The purpose of menu labeling is to promote informed consumer decision-making and prevent consumer confusion about calorie and nutrition content.** Studies have found that 9 out of 10 people underestimate the calorie content of less-healthy items by an average of more than 600 calories (almost 50% less than the actual calorie content). Even professional nutritionists underestimated the calorie content of restaurant foods--by 220 to 680 calories. The current information gap has resulted in distorted perceptions of what are appropriate meals and portion sizes.

**Consumers have a right to know this information.** The federal government, through the 1990 National Labeling and Education Act, took an important first step to ensure that Americans are informed about the materials their clothing is made from, the composition of personal care and household cleaning products, and what ingredients are in the packaged foods they consume. Three of every four adults read those food labels. As more people purchase meals for consumption outside the home it is a logical next step that this information be provided at the point of purchase in fast food restaurants.

**Customers are not taking advantage of information as it is currently presented.** We recently conducted a study to assess whether people accessed nutrition information as it is currently presented on brochures and posters. Only 6 of the 4300 patrons observed accessed the information. These findings suggest that in order to affect customers' purchasing behavior, the nutrition information must be displayed on menus and menu boards. We also recommend including a statement such as "The average adult eats 2000 calories per day," placed prominently on the menus and boards. This information will help people make better decisions about how many calories they can afford to order at the time.

**The public is in favor of menu labeling.** In New York City, where menu labeling has been in effect for almost one year, a January 2009 poll found that 9 out of 10 consumers are in favor of it. More than 80% of customers surveyed said the calorie listings made an impact on what they ordered. Seventy-one percent looked for and ordered lower calorie alternatives. And three-fourths think governments should play a more active role in regulating health and nutrition concerns.

We believe the menu labeling legislation under consideration is supported by good science and has the aim of giving consumers the necessary information to make healthful food choices according to their own personal goals and circumstances.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this very important public health issue.

Respectfully submitted,



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